



The Media's Myopia: CK Chats Up Convergence with Al Ries.

*Divergence is a brand's best friend—so why aren't
Mad Ave and the Media paying it any mind?*

— by Christina Kerley —

Part 2 of a 2-part Series

For decades there has been a constant stream of convergence stories promising that devices, appliances, technologies and industries will converge in the not-too-distant future. It made me wonder if anyone else noticed how that future never gets closer, just more distant. Since I've been baffled by convergence's cult-like following long before I covered it in my weekly poll last year, it was validating for two of today's foremost thought leaders to articulate it as Al and Laura Ries have in "The Origin of Brands", their most recent book.

But when I reached out to Al to discuss his ideas on divergence (and his issues with convergence), I learned rather than striking a chord with the media, Ries has hit a nerve. His divergence message has not only fallen on deaf ears; it's fallen asunder to closed minds.

In part one of this series, I focused on Mad Ave's divergence denial, contending while Mad Ave is preaching convergence, through myriad brand launches and endless line extensions, it's actually practicing divergence. **In this segment I'm talking about those who talk convergence most: the Media.**

To be sure, convergence has given us many things. It's given us convenience, at a high price to quality and ease of use (we're still waiting for our smart phones to wise up). It's given us the *illusion* of convergence, through bundled products with the fancy convergence term slapped on (while integrated, software suites don't converge technologies, they bundle software programs). And it's given us 'all-in-ones' that cost less than buying several separate devices (they should, their quality is usually less). But of all the things convergence has given us, most prominent is the constant bellow of hype (that mostly rings hollow).

While the hype over convergence is deafening, the evidence to convergence's contrary is astounding—almost as astounding as its lack of media coverage. The media may not be talking divergence, but Al and I are. He's taking your questions too; join in **The Great Debate** and let us know which side of the spectrum you're on, and why.

CK: Why isn't anyone talking divergence— why is divergence a 'dirty little secret'?

Ries: "One problem is that people have never heard the word divergence. The media can't say convergence enough but do they ever mention the word or concept of divergence? Never. **But how can you have a legitimate conversation unless you at least discuss the opposite issue called divergence?**

The media doesn't agree with anti-convergence thinking, and that's fine. But why not at least expose the idea, rather than pre-judging it? They're looking at new books, new concepts, new ideas from the standpoint of right or wrong. But that's not their place; they should be in the position of exposing the argument from both sides, not judging it from only one."

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CK: What about all the 'convergence-as-a-category-killer' buzz?

Ries: "To look at the convenience store and say the supermarket industry is dead—because everyone will be shopping at convenience stores—is ridiculous. But that's exactly what they're saying in high-tech with the computer coming together with the TV. **And yet TVs are going in one direction with BIG plasma screens and computers are going in the other direction, with smaller, more lightweight screens;** and cell phone screens, to watch video, are even smaller."

CK: Why does convergence have such an enormous hold on the media?

Ries: "I think it's because it's an exciting concept. The idea of putting together, say, an automobile with an airplane, and architecting the 'aero-car', is cool and exciting. The manufacturer thinks 'If I can just make it practical; it needs to be light enough to fly, heavy enough to drive.' **But the problem with the flying car is the problem with most all converged products: it's trying to do two things that are the opposite.** An automobile literally has to be heavy enough to stay on the highway, an airplane light enough to stay in the air. Still it's an exciting concept so it gets a lot of coverage."

CK: But the media is saying we're going from many to one, not one to many, what gives?

Ries: "If the media were right and everything is coming together, our typical client could say 'We can't build any new brands because everything is coming together?' But that's not what clients are saying, or doing. **So much of marketers' work is identifying the category to build the brand. We're in the brand-building business and the best way to build the brand is to create new categories—and to dominate those new brand categories.**"

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Still can't shake your convergence convictions? Instead of looking *forward* to a converged world, try looking *backward* at divergence's long history. Ponder this: if everything is converging into universal platforms and products, and convergence renders earlier platforms obsolete, why didn't TV replace radio? Radio didn't die, it thrived by

diverging into AM, FM, digital and satellite formats. On the other dial, why didn't the Web kill TV? TV diverged from three network stations into scores of cable, premium cable, satellite and regional stations, to speak nothing of its infinite program genres. First we had dramas, sitcoms and soap operas. Now we have: romantic comedies, dramatic comedies (or 'dramedies'), documentaries, mockumentaries, talk TV, court TV, reality TV, celebrity-reality series, procedurals, crime-scene series, and many more; with more to come.

And digital content is following suit, diverging across Internet, PDA, mobile phone and iPod platforms. **Where convergence has yet to truly pay off, divergence has paid in spades—and still there is no speak of the dark horse that is divergence.**

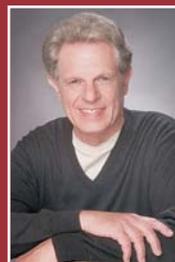
Speak *your* mind; join Al and me in **The Great Debate**. Tell us which side of the spectrum you're on and why. And if you're press, please speak now—you've held your peace for far too long.

For more on this HOT Topic:

- **Read** Part 1 of this 2-part series.
- **Join the Debate** Al and I answer your questions.
- **Get the book** "The Origin of Brands".
- **Check out** Laura Ries' divergence blog.



About Al Ries: Al Ries is the author or co-author of 11 books on marketing, including his latest, *The Origin of Brands*. He and his daughter Laura run the Atlanta-based marketing strategy firm Ries & Ries. Their website: www.ries.com



About CK: CK is Christina Kerley, a divergence-friendly marketing specialist whose clients range Mad Ave, Media and Tech. Known by many as 'CK'; she's a contributing columnist who covers topics and trends for *The Madison Avenue Journal*. Her consultancy is at: www.ckEpiphany.com

